The Place of Immigrants:

Politics of Difference in Territorial and Social Space

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ABSTRACT

Canada's immigration discourse tends to treat immigrants as the object of inquiry. The discourse itself is taken for granted and seldom scrutinized. This paper discusses the framework by which immigration discourse is shaped and articulated. The goal is to understand the representation of immigrants in the construction and safe-keeping of Canada's actual and virtual boundary. The author contends that the discursive mapping of immigrants in Canada's territorial and social terrains is an extension of politics of difference.

Canada's public immigration discourse tends to treat immigrants as the object of inquiry, focusing on who they are, how they perform in Canada, and whether they bring economic and social value. Rarely is the discourse itself being scrutinized. This paper examines the cultural framework by which the understanding of immigrants has been shaped, focusing on the historical continuity and contemporary relevance of 'race' or 'racialized others.' The focus is on the representation of desirable and undesirable immigrants in the construction, maintenance and safe-keeping of Canada's actual and virtual boundary. The place of immigrants in territorial and social space indicates not only the nature and quality of immigrants, but also the ideological and discursive grounds by which 'insiders' represent 'outsiders' and by which those who have successfully secured legitimacy and power racialize others deemed to be fundamentally different. Thus, the discursive mapping of immigrants in Canada's territorial and social terrains is an extension of politics of difference.

Ideological Framework and Immigration

Gramsci (1973) and Hall (1996a, 1996b) have stressed the importance of cultural frameworks in giving meaning to different classes to enable them to make sense of the world around them, and in doing so, cultural frameworks assume a life of their own capable of changing the material and political world, and thus contributing to reproducing it. In other words, the objectified social world is represented through ideas, language, symbols, and culture, and in turn, the representation gives meaning of the social world to people. As Hall (1996c) put it, "regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive,* and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event, role." In this way, contestations in the social world, whether they are based on class, gender and race, necessarily involves contestations in the symbolic order of representation. The study of representation frames incorporates many facets, including what Hall (1996c: 442) called "relations of representation" such as the "contestation of the marginality," as well as how "a set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking of a historical bloc" (Hall, 1996a: 27). In short, unequal relations in the social world are both reflected and constituted by unequal relations of representation.

Immigrants are not only latecomers to Canada's geographical space, but also symbolic representations in ideas, norms and language, and indeed in a system of understanding. In other words, immigrants are actual people born outside the country having been admitted to Canada, as well as symbolic representations of those who, in the eyes of the resident population, should be given or denied entry to Canada. This system of understanding, or cultural framework, is used by Canada's resident population to evaluate immigrants and to pass judgments on their merits and shortcomings. This cultural framework is influenced and shaped by the relations in society, but in turn, it also provides meanings to old-timers and affects how they relate to latecomers.

International migration involves individuals and families uprooting from a country of origin, crossing the physical boundary of another nation, and venturing into the social boundary of the destination society. No doubt, the outcome of immigration is contingent upon the self effort of immigrants in overcoming the hardship of boundary crossing, both geographical and social, but it also depends on how much the resident population is prepared to open the door to welcome the outsiders at the gate. The "warmth of the welcome," as Reitz (1998) calls it, depends on the institutional features of the receiving society, including educational opportunities, welfare accessibility and labour market arrangements. However, it also depends on the representational frame by which those who see themselves as old-timers use to evaluate newcomers at the border.

Much of this representational frame is shaped by ideas, concepts, and norms which old-timers inherit and develop in their understanding of 'others,' that is, those who are deemed to be different by virtue of their birthplace, race, language and other cultural idiosyncrasies. Historically, Canada has maintained a racialized cultural framework to judge those being excluded or included as immigrants within its national borders. The cultural framework continues to influence the way Canada sees the security of its territorial boundary as well as the integrity of its social boundary. Thus, to understand the warmth of the welcome also involves studying insiders' cultural representation of 'outsiders' and how the discursive frame enables insiders to maintain and safeguard the physical and symbolic boundary of the nation.

Like other discourses, the immigration discourse is guided by a normative framework, an ideological road map, and a linguistic coherence. Naturally, there are diversities in the way the discourse is articulated, but the discourse has coherence, and has in common certain ideas, concepts and terminologies regarding how 'outsiders' are to be represented. The representation revolves around demarcating the national boundary in terms of two types of space: territorial space and symbolic/social/cultural space.

Racializing Canada's Border

Canada's immigration discourse has been framed from the vantage point of self-interest, as defined by old-timers' predisposition of the type of newcomers to Canada that would advance or harm its national interests. From such a vantage point, the interests of immigrant sending countries and of global inequality and redistribution are seldom considered (Li, 2003a).

Historically, the immigration discourse has racialized the territorial boundary of Canada in upholding the value of European immigrants, notably those from Britain, northern Europe, and the United States, and discounting the contributions of non-white immigrants, particularly those from Asia. In other words, Canada's territorial security and interest were expressed in clear racial terms, with an unequivocal understanding that the value of non-European races to Canada was questionable. This discursive framework has been influenced by Canada's long-standing racial ideology which saw Asian immigrants as racially, morally and culturally inferior to the Occidental tradition of Canada (Anderson, 1991; Roy, 1989; Ward, 1978). Hence, the historical restriction and exclusion of Asian immigrants to Canada were equated with safeguarding Canada's borders and its European tradition from what was seen as the "yellow peril."

Even during the period of wheat boom at the turn of the nineteenth century when Canada adopted the expansionist immigration policy of Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, the official discourse made a clear distinction between the European settlers and the questionable Asian workers (Hoerder, 1999; Kelly and Trebilcock, 1998; Li, 1998). It was a period of open door for Europeans, and 3 million of them came between 1896 and 1914, as settlers in the prairies and workers in urban Canada (Li, 2003a: 19). But the same period also saw the enactment of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1900 to raise the Chinese Head Tax to $100, another act in 1903 to further raise the Chinese Head Tax to $500, and the "continuous journey" act in 1908 to discourage the sailing of East Indians from India to Canada (Li, 1998). These legislative measures were seen as necessary to protect Canada as a nation of Europeans from the racial and social contamination of Asians. "Racial" distinction was deeply engraved in Canada's ideological framework of nation building and was effectively used as an instrument of settlement, population growth, and border control.

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The need to safeguard Canada's border from racially undesirable immigrants was reaffirmed by Mackenzie King in 1947, in his famous statement to reject what he called "large-scale immigration from the orient" because of its potential harmful effects to Canada, at a time when Canada was planning to expand immigration. Throughout the 1950s, Canada restricted Chinese immigration on the grounds that it could become what J.W. Pickersgill, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration from 1954 to 1957, called "an avenue for the back door infiltration of communist agents" (Canada, House of Commons, 9 June, 1960: 4715-16). Indeed, during the period of the Cold War, Canada's concerns of national and border security were guided by its anti-communist stance that interpreted communist regimes as a threat to Canada and western democracy. Since Chinese immigrants originated from China, a communist state, Chinese immigrants were seen as posing a potential security threat to Canada (Li, 1998: 93). No doubt, the historical image of the Chinese as morally questionable, culturally inferior and socially unassimilable could only contribute to the stereotype of their being untrustworthy.

If communist China was an enemy of the west, then anti-communist elements could only advance the national interests of Canada as a democratic state. Undoubtedly, the mentality of the Cold War prompted Canada to accept, between 1956 and 1958, about 38,000 of the 190,000 refugees who fled Hungary following the Soviet suppression of the 1956 anti-communist uprising (see Hawkins, 1988: 114).

The "point system" of selecting immigrants introduced by the 1967 Immigration Regulations was often cherished as marking the end of racialization of immigration. In 1979 and 1980, Canada showed the same generosity to the

Vietnamese refugees as it did to the Hungarians by accepting 60,000 "boat people" from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon (Li, 1998: 95). The admission of Vietnamese boat people in the late 1970s served a political purpose of the time: it reinforced the image of Canada as a humanitarian and democratic nation in contrast to the horror of a communist regime even though it succeeded in uniting North and South Vietnam. But Canada was reluctant to continue to admit large numbers of Vietnamese in refugee camps from Southeast Asian in the 1980s because the Vietnamese refugees had outlived their political value to Canada, and had become an international burden.

By the time several boatloads of Chinese migrants came to the west shore of Canada in 1999 to claim refugee status, Canada was more interested in trading with countries behind the "iron curtain" than to use those who fled the country to undermine the regime. The 599 Chinese who landed illegally on the west coast in 1999 were seen as a threat to Canada's security because the migrants were pauperized and because more were suspected to follow. Canada reacted with panic and took extraordinary steps to incarcerate them. The public too, was unsympathetic to the Chinese despite their hazardous journey. A 1999 public poll found 70% of Canadian respondents rejected the idea of automatically granting the Chinese boat people a claim to be political refugees (*Globe and Mail,* 1999). A minister referred to the migrants as "law-breakers" who abused Canada's generosity, and as a result had stirred up an anti-immigration backlash (*National Post,* 1999).

By 2000, of the 599 Chinese migrants who came by boat in 1999, only 16 were granted refugee status, but the government spent $36 million in processing and incarcerating them (*Globe and Mail,* 2000). In their analysis of the media reporting of the Chinese arrival, Hier and Greenberg (2002) argued that a racialized moral panic was created in Canada, with a large part of the public and the new media viewing the refugee system and the "illegal Chinese" as a threat to national security. In particular, the news media highlighted the potential threat of Chinese migrants in bringing infectious diseases to Canada, increasing organized crime, and using Canada as a conduit of illegal immigration to the U.S. (Hier and Greenberg, 2002). The moral panic towards the undocumented migrants created in the print media was out of proportion, and Hier and Greenberg (2002) attributed it to a racial backlash against the Chinese.

The threat of racialized populations to the security of Canada is also articulated in concerns over organized crime and violence. The idea of Asian immigrants bringing a higher level of organized crime and violence to Canada has periodically surfaced in the media. As early as 1991, *Macleans* magazine ran a feature article entitled "Terror in the streets: Ruthless Asian Gangs bring a new wave of violence to Canadian cities" (*Macleans,* 1991). Based on several incidents, mostly in Toronto, the article said the killings have established a "new threshold in a surge of **Asian violence** sweeping the country" (*Macleans,* 1991). In her book entitled *Immigration: The Economic Case,* Diane Francis described the growth of Tamil community in Canada under the heading of Tamil terrorists, and quoted a source to refer to Tamil Tigers and their accomplices as having been "involved in a wide range of criminal activities in this country" (Francis, 2002: 145). In their analysis of news reports of crimes committed by Asians in Canada, Henry and Tator (2002: 201) pointed out that the media often made stereotypic assumptions of Asian immigrant communities as violent and gang-infected, and elevated crimes committed by individuals to the level of collective features of the communities.

The 9-11 disaster brought a new round of security concerns for Canada to safeguard its border. The allegations by the U.S. that the border of Canada has been lax and terrorists could easily infiltrate Canada created added pressures to tighten security, targeting in particular individuals from the Middle East and Islamic countries. Immigration critics such as Daniel Stoffman seized the opportunity to attack immigration policy. He described what he called the "root causes of Canada's vulnerability to terrorism" as follows: "an immigration program that lets in more people than is consistent with public safety, and a refugee system that allows known criminals and terrorists and unidentified people from all over the world to roam freely in Canada" (Stoffman, 2002: 53).

In the aftermath of 9-11, the need to manage immigration and to keep racialized elements suspected of being prone to terrorism from entering became a priority security issue. The 9-11 attacks have provided the grounds for the general public to condone vigilance and suspicion towards certain racial groups. A poll conducted by Environics in August of 2002 indicated that 43% of respondents said Canada accepts too many immigrants from Arab countries (*Ottawa Citizen,* 2002). Raja Khoury, president of the Canadian-Arab Federation, said that the Arab community has suffered from an increase negative stereotyping and prejudice since September 11, 2001, and that "there is a continuous association between Islam and terrorism in the media, while there is nothing to balance the image." (*Montreal Gazette,* 2003) In the post 9-11 period, there is wide acceptance by the Canadian government and the public that draconian measures towards those from Arab and Islamic countries are necessary steps to protect the borders of Canada and to safeguard its national security.

Beside the recent concerns of terrorism from those of Islamic origin, Canada has also associated certain origins with potential health hazards. For example, in a 2002 article entitled "Immigration fuels soaring TB rate", the *Times Colonist* (Victoria) reported: "…most of the immigrants who come to B.C. arrive from countries where TB is rampant – India, China, the Philippines and Vietnam." (*Times Colonist,* 2002) The paper also printed the comment of Dr. Kevin Elwood, director of TB control for the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, as follows: "The Chinese immigrants are particularly not interested in preventable drugs." (*Times Colonist,* 2002) During the outbreak of SARS earlier this year, the Chinese-Canadian community in Toronto reported experiencing hostility and discrimination from the general public, as the Chinese were being blamed for having brought the disease to the city and devastated its economy (*Mingpao,* 2003; *Globe and Mail,* 2003). However, concerns over the mad cow disease

of Britain were not translated into blaming immigrants in Canada originated from there.

These examples show that a racialized ideological framework has influenced Canada's ideas of nation-building. Even though the groups being racialized have changed, a racialized cultural framework continues to influence Canada's representation and discourse of outside threats to national security.

Safeguarding Canada's Social Space

Much of Canada's immigration discourse has to do with keeping the wrong people out and safeguarding its territorial space from intruders who are often depicted with a racial overtone. Canada also uses a cultural framework in guarding its social boundary from 'undesirable' immigrants, including those who have been admitted to Canada. In other words, Canada maintains a normative standard to differentiate different kinds of immigrants being admitted, based on how much immigrants are deemed to enrich or undermine the social boundary of Canada as a nation.

In their highly sensational attack on Canada's immigration system, critics such as Diane Francis (2002), Daniel Stoffman (2002) and Martin Collacott (2002) advocate a substantial reduction in immigration on the grounds that the types of immigrants Canada admits do not contribute very much, and indeed may be harmful, to the economic, social, demographic and fiscal well-being of the nation. Besides using selective evidence and fallacious arguments, these authors dwell on a harsh utilitarian dictum: immigrants not obviously enriching Canada are useless to Canada. Indeed, it is precisely based on this principle that Collacott attacked priorities given to family class sponsorship as having what he called "the most negative impact," on the presumed grounds that these immigrants do not bring human capital and take resources from Canada (Collacott, 2002: 19).

The ideological premise upon which the immigration critics construct their arguments is in fact not far from the official stance. Canada has maintained a *de facto* dual policy regarding immigration: the selection of economic immigrants and the admission of 'unchosen' or 'self-selected' family members and asylum seekers (Li, 2003a). Much attention towards immigration policy development is directed towards selecting immigrants of high human capital capacity, and restricting and managing the sponsorship of family members and asylum seekers. The official discourse consistently attributes a greater value to economic immigrants and blames the so-called self-selected immigrants – family class and refugees – for squeezing out the economic stream (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1993: 2, 7). The 1996 annual report to the Parliament by the minister of citizenship and immigration stated: "Research shows that economic immigration is the component that benefits Canada and Canadians most quickly and to the greater extent." (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996: 7) It was this mentality which prompted the recent changes in immigration policy in allotting a greater proportion of land immigrants to the economic class. Since 2000, the economic class has made up 60% or more of the total landed immigrants to Canada every year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003).

Periodically, the immigration discourse dwells on extended familism of other cultures as a challenge to managing the 'unchosen' family-class immigration. A 1994 report of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada entitled *Into the 21st Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship* outlined the problem as follows:

> "In Canada, the traditional definition of family has been changing. Single parent families are now common. Family is also defined differently in other cultures. The traditional family unit, i.e. father, mother and independent children, has long been at the heart of Canadian society. However, in other countries close ties frequently exist with extended family members. These are some of the factors which need to be considered in Canada's approach to family immigration." (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994a: 11)

The subtext is clear: immigrants from cultures foreign to Canada uphold extended familism and maintain a large family network that is contrary to Canadian family values. There is a strong overtone regarding the need to re-conceptualize the family reunification program based on the nuclear family of Canada and not the extended family of Asia or Africa. Several academic studies have attributed the declining earnings of immigrants in the 1980s relative to earlier arrivals to the increase in the family immigration stream and the disproportional distribution of Asian immigrants across the admission classes (Bloom, Grenier and Gunderson, 1995; Miller, 1992). Taken together, the discourse portrays an urgency to control the family-class stream of immigration used more often by non-European immigrants in order to uphold Canada's living standard and to reserve immigration allotments to those more deserving 'selected' immigrants.

It is on the subject of immigrant diversity that the ideological framework used to maintain Canada's social boundary can be more fully understood. It is a widely accepted conclusion that as a result of changes in immigration regulations in 1967, there has been an increase in the 'diversity' of Canada, brought about by an increasing number of immigrants from 'non-traditional' source countries (Li, 2003b). As early as 1989, a report by Employment and Immigration Canada (1989: 8-9) had this to say: "…Canada's immigration is coming increasingly from 'non-traditional' parts of the world. Thirty years ago, more than 80% of Canada's immigrants came from Europe or countries of European heritage, whereas 70% now come from Asia alone… As a result, many Canadians are concerned that the country is in danger of losing a sense of national identity." The notion of diversity in the immigration discourse has become a standard term used to refer to 'non-white,' and sometimes to the problem of having too many 'non-whites.'

For example, under the heading "Immigration and Diversity", a 1994 CIC report (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994b) discussed how Canadians' concerns about immigration were triggered by increasingly large numbers coming from Asia (Li, 2001). Another CIC report of the same year talked about how Canadians were concerned about the impact of immigration on "values and traditions

that form the foundation of Canadian society," and worried about their country being fragmented and becoming "a loose collection of parts" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994a: 10). Throughout the 1990s, the immigration debate reiterated the idea that the rapid upsurge in immigration from Asia and Africa was changing urban Canada too radically (Li, 2001). Thus, too much diversity from non-white immigrants is seen as undermining Canada's traditional values, changing its social fabrics, and weakening its cohesiveness.

The immigration discourse also depicts Canada as a demographic and open society that supports multiculturalism and allows immigrants to integrate without requiring them to abandon their cultures. The contradiction of endorsing multiculturalism on the one hand and questioning immigrants' diversity on the other is resolved by adopting a rhetoric that upholds the ideological value of multiculturalism but dismisses the merit of cultural specificities. For example, official statements often repeat the following message regarding integration: "In Canada, integration is a two-way process of accommodation between newcomers and Canadians: It encourages immigrants to adapt to Canadian society without requiring them to abandon their cultures." (Dorais, 2002: 4) However, when it comes to the value of cultural specificities such as the immigrant enclaves, an official report has this to say:

> "Ethnic enclaves can play a positive role in easing the shock of adjustment to a new culture… To the degree that ethnic enclaves restrict their members and shield them from alternative norms, values and behaviours, they can discourage immigrants from full participation in society and perpetuate segregation… Ideally, in an integrated society, immigrants move through the ethnic enclave, using its resources in order to enter the mainstream society." (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1993: 4-5)

Thus, the underlying normative frame upholds a social boundary of Canada within which newcomers are expected to conform, and within which institutionalized cultural differences are seen as promoting segregation, hindering integrating, and acting against the interest of 'mainstream society.'

Immigration critics tend to be more blatant in their condemnation of essentialized cultural differences. Stoffman (2002:16), for example, referred to multiculturalism as "divisive… because different cultures have irreconcilable values… (and) because Canada is built… around a shared belief in the values of democracy and individual freedom." In short, people from different cultures are described as having "irreconcilable values" that threaten Canada's democracy and freedom at the encouragement of official multiculturalism. Collacott (2002:29-30) made a similar point when he blamed family-class immigration and modern communication technology for assisting immigrant enclave development in urban Canada, thus slowing immigrant integration.

Breton (1984) has argued that the racial and ethnic tensions of the late 1970s and 1980s reflected the process of restructuring a symbolic order and status hierarchy in which the cultural dominance and complacency of British-origin Canadians were being challenged. Indeed, the tensions that underline the reactions of some old-timers to many social changes in Canada reflect a prevailing normative representation to essentialize superficial racial differences. Over time, as immigrants' racial differences are associated with undesirable changes in normative representative, diversity becomes incompatible with the demographic tradition and core values of Canada, or a threat to Canada's romanticized social space. The battle over the so-called Chinese 'monster homes' in Vancouver in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Li, 1994), the attempt to restrict the Asianization of suburban malls in Markham in the 1990s (Li, 1998:146-148), and the general blame towards non-white immigrants for crowding the city and changing the urban landscape and indeed altering the Canadian way of life reflect a racialized normative standard which some old-times use to territorialize Canada's urban and social space.

Conclusion

The place of immigrants in Canada is influenced by the cultural representation of 'outsiders' used by those who have successfully secured and legitimized the territorial claim to safeguard the physical and symbolic boundary. As Stuart Hall (1996a) reminds us, cultural representation has its central place because it is in representation that categories and relations are to be understood and shaped.

Cultural representation relies on the use of codes as conveyed in language, symbols, texts and subtexts, which have a history and a pre-existing understanding. The notion of 'race' survives in a democratic country like Canada as a meaningful social code because its symbolic meaning has been reshaped and transformed to suit the time. Part of the transformation is to distil the ugly aspects associated with overt racism to retain other aspects of race that make them palatable to people as though they are not concerned with 'race' and are indeed against racism. Thus, the new representation of race can appear as rational, public-minded (as opposed to self-serving) and indeed liberal minded.

Much of Canada's assessment of immigrants has to do with its representation of racialized new immigrants as diversity problems for Canada – crowding of major cities, contribution to urban crime, environmental degradation and travel congestion, overburdening of the educational system, social, health, welfare, and infrastructural services, adding pressures to the job market, housing market, and altering the social fabric of Canada. In short, the immigration problem is represented as problem of too much diversity, and racialized new immigrants are represented as endless intruders to urban and social space.

Racialized immigrants are also being represented as 'newcomers' from 'non-traditional' sources despite their long history in Canada. This representation reflects how racialized immigrants have been marginalized throughout history in Canada as foreign workers and not as deserving permanent citizens. Racialized new immigrants are also represented as multicultural objects, and not subjects of multiculturalism. As multicultural objects, they only bring superficial novelties and add quantity to Canada's diverse

population. As objects, they are to make Canada look better as a tolerant society, but not to demand Canada to change for their sake.

The representation positions racialized new immigrants at the margin, as objects of evaluation, and not subjects whose values, aspirations and wishes are to be taken into account. This is an extension of the normative, historical representation of non-whites in Canada, and it reflects their marginality in Canada's discursive space (see Hall, 1996b). The marginalized representation of racialized immigrants is justified on the grounds that old-timers have a right to decide who should be admitted as newcomers and citizens, and on the grounds that immigrants are not in a position to demand changes in Canada because they have made the choice to come to a pre-existing social order. In short, the representation successfully silences the voice of new immigrants and denies them a place in the representational space of the normative and symbolic order. The representation shapes the politics of difference and becomes in itself the politics of difference. Many relations and factors may have influenced the cultural representation of newcomers, but it is in the representation itself that social relations and social categories are given meaning in people's lives. In short, the representation provides concrete meanings and contours to the symbolic and geographic space of a nation.

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